1: Turnbull E-4, 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

[NET HUNTERS]

There is no record of any form of execution, though it has been known for the aged and infirm, too sick to care for themselves, or for those suspected of being possessed of supernatural powers, to disappear or to die of some strange sickness, under unusual circumstances. It was Putnam's opinion that such deaths might have been occasioned deliberately, but he had no means of verification. [114]

INTELLECTUAL AND ARTISTIC LIFE

Exact Knowledge

COUNTING

Putnam mentions the use of finger signs in counting and the Mbuti habit of counting in pairs. Despite this simplicity, however, they are able to assess quantity accurately and speedily, as witnessed by their dexterity in their favorite gambling game in which beans are thrown onto a mat. The success of the throw depends on whether or not a combination of four results. The Pygmy knows at a glance whether he has to throw in an extra bean or slip one out in order to make the necessary adjustment. If there is disagreement, the beans are checked in pairs of pairs.

Medicine

Putnam frequently tried to copy the preparation of poisons used by the net hunters on [P. 231-D]

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

out the liquid that drains from it (*kombo*) is caught in leaf cups and drunk. Never is any honey wasted, never is it kept or used in the preparation of other foods; what is not consumed on the spot is eaten or drunk the moment it is brought back into camp.

There is a craving for honey during the season that never seems to be satisfied. No amount of alternative foods, even meat, can reduce this passion for honey. Each band has its own way of listening for the telltale sound of bees swarming. Among some, a leaf is rubbed between the hands, which are then rubbed across the forehead to enable the hunter to see the bees high up in their hives. I found this practice among the eastern archers. Elsewhere, throughout the net-hunting region and also among the western archers, at least, the chameleon (*ameuli*) is believed to lead the Mbuti to honey by uttering a long-drawn-out throaty cry. Chameleons, however, are not known to be capable of making any such noise, and the noted ornithologist Dr. James Chapin claims to have tracked this weird sound down to the *Sarothrura elegans*, a bird with a skinny pouch in its neck that enables it to give an unbroken wail lasting fifteen seconds or more.

But most noticeable among a people who take the success of hunting and gathering so much for granted is the presence of honey-collecting magic, and an inordinate emphasis on song and dance, legend-telling and other recreational activities. There is no doubt that whatever else it may be, the honey season is also a festive season where celebration is the order of the day, even at the cost of a relatively empty stomach.

Some activities are purely recreational, such as spinning tops made of nut sections, and gambling with dried seeds thrown on the ground to make up a total number that is a multiple of four. Others are educational, and in particular the honey swing is for training youngsters in agility at heights, as are the informal contests at climbing dangling vines. The honey swing is suspended from two high branches, so that it has a long, powerful arc. The youths line up and one jumps into the bend of the vine that forms the seat and sets the swing in motion. As the swing moves backwards, a youth runs forward, catching onto the side of the vine, giving it added momentum. As it carries him off the ground, he throws his legs forward and up over his head and into the swing just as the previous occupant jumps to the ground.

The younger children also play with smaller swings, and they have their own game of climbing saplings until there are so many of them that the young tree bends to the ground. The children then leap to

3t Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1962 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

or dry, with few real ups and downs that affect the life of the group as a whole.

Occasionally an elephant is killed, and that means the entire camp will be abandoned at once and a new one built around the dead animal, so that it can be eaten on the spot. The Pygmies point out that this is easier than bringing the elephant to the camp. It means a week of merry-making, of singing and dancing and no hunting. The only trouble is that it also means visits from the villagers. On such occasions they will pluck up their courage and venture into the forest, feeling that with such an abundance of meat the Pygmies will be in a generous frame of mind. The Pygmies try to avoid this by immediately sending meat to the village. But when villagers do come, they are generally courteously received and allowed to stay for a day or two. After that, if they are slow with gifts of rice or tobacco, the Pygmies have various ways of making them move on. The forest is the world of the Pygmy, and he is not bashful about telling a villager who outstays his welcome just what he thinks of him.

I stayed in one camp which was only a few hours from the village and on the way to a Negro fishing ground. We were constantly beset by villagers passing through, and after a while the Pygmies got tired of feeding them, tired of being used as a convenient stopping place. So when they were asked for food, the Pygmies would agree on condition that the villagers join them in a game of *panda*. This is a gambling game in which beans are thrown on a mat, or on a flat piece of ground. Some of them are quickly scooped up by one of the two players. The other, looking to see how many are left, has to estimate at a glance how many his opponent has taken. He then tells his opponent to throw down one, two, or three beans, or to stay as he is. The count is then made—also at a glance—and if the player has an exact multiple of four he wins. But against villagers Pygmies always win. For one thing they have an uncanny sense of

3: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1962 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

form that enables them in a moment to know the exact number thrown down. And for another the villagers are not so nimble as the Pygmies. When a Pygmy sees that he is going to lose by a couple of beans, he quickly drops them from the store he has concealed between his fingers, or even in his hair, thus by a triumphant jerk of his hands or his head throwing in the winning beans.

The villagers left that camp stripped of their fish, their tobacco, and whatever else they had to gamble away, and they soon came to prefer an alternative route that by-passed our camp.

There are a few villagers that are welcome in a Pygmy camp, but they are rare. Others can come with sackloads of food and still get a cold reception. I have seen this happen; as soon as the Pygmies have divided up the food they send the villagers on their way. But others can come empty-handed and be received gladly, because they understand the Pygmies and the forest. For the Pygmies this is the criterion of a "real person," as opposed to the animal-humans who live in permanent villages out in the open, away from the shelter and affection of the trees.

Any visitations by villagers are temporary, and they usually have some political significance. A Negro chief who wants to win more Pygmies to his village may send out a son with gifts to stay in a Pygmy camp. Every day more gifts and food are sent out so that he can distribute these. It is a risky business because, as the villagers say, "The BaMbuti eat us up until we have nothing left for ourselves!" But if a chief's son wins the affection of the Pygmies, his father will have won a steady supply of meat—for a time, anyway.

One afternoon I saw two village girls arrive, followed by two servants who threw down loads of plantains and sweet bananas, and a sack of manioc flour. The servants left and the girls came over and sat down unconcernedly at Masamba's fire. Masamba came out of her hut and greeted them with warmth, and soon a number of